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RECENT LITERATURE.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE ON COINS, WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.—The late Congress has given the country abundant reasons for never wishing to see it again, but it remained for it to add as an appropriate headstone to mark its grave the above report. This committee was composed as follows: A. H. Stephens, Chairman; Levi Maish, Robt. B. Vance, J. B. Clark (Mo.), R. M. Knapp, H. L. Muldrow, J. B. Clarke (Ky.), M. S. Brewer, Thos. Ryan, J. W. Dwight, R. L. Gibson. To all appearance these gentlemen have embodied their views on the metrical system in a report of 234 pages. This report contains a collection of various works, reports, tables, &c., &c., from many sources, and in so far as the printing is accurate perhaps the labors of the committee have not been fruitless. But it is too evident that there has been no original thinking done by the committee on this important subject, nor do they seem to understand the contributions of others, while the form of the report is such as to make it appear that work done by others was done by the committee.

The introductory lines, which are doubtless original with the compiler of this report, are not, either in literary or statistical merit, up to the standard of what he has scissored. Thus we read, p. 6, that "Phidon of Argos in *Greece*, nearly a thousand years before the Christian era, gave the subject (?) his profound attention, but with no nearer approximation to what was wanting than any of his predecessors," &c.

The picture of Phidon (?) of Argos profoundly attentive while far, far away from the desirable but missing, is touching. Poor Phidon would have been reveling in the closest propinquity (at least by comparison) could he have only survived long enough to be placed in possession of this report.

The carelessness of this pot-pourri (or perhaps *ragout* would be more appropriate) is not only exhibited in the manner in which good pieces of work have been put together, but in the perpetuation of the radically wrong relation between the inch and the meter expressed by the number 39.370432, a number accepted by no persons on the globe except those directly influenced by the office of the United States Coast Survey.

Page 8, we read that "Some writer has said that the adoption of the Metric System in solving mathematical problems (?) in our public and private schools would save one full year's hard study in a boy's or girl's collegiate course."

Passing over the loose and only partly intelligible style of this statement, it is fair to presume that it grew out of "some writer's" ill remembrance of the following paragraph on the back of one of the Metric Bureau "Broad-sides:"

"The Hon. John Yates (an Englishman), after protracted inquiry and investigations in the schools and among those best able to

judge of the matter, reported that the complete adoption of the decimal, in place of the present English weights and measures, would save two full years in the school-life of every child educated. In our country the saving would be something less, because of our adoption of the decimal currency; but the most conservative teachers acknowledge that something like this amount of time would be saved each child if our present confusion of measures were entirely replaced by the International or Metric System."

It should be said in justice to the composer of this report that his English is no worse than that signed by seven distinguished names (p. 57), of which the following is a sample: "It is gratifying to know that the President of the United States, on having been consulted by Mr. Washburne upon the question of affixing his signature, was authorized by telegraph to do so, and signed the convention accordingly."

It was no doubt very kind of Mr. Washburne to permit the President to sign the convention, but who did Mr. Washburne represent?

We must conclude this hasty summary of the Report of the Committee on Coins, Weights and Measures, by drawing attention to the fact that the three tables published in Frazer's pamphlet on the "Proposed Substitution of the Metric for our own Weights and Measures," appear on p. 229 and the unnumbered following page of the report are without the slightest acknowledgment of the source whence they were taken.

This is the more remarkable in the table called "Distribution of English Units," because this is a photograph of a free hand diagram of Mr. Frazer, which was improved in the pamphlet above referred to. It contains a patent error (as here produced) in the line which leads up from the "Rod Pole or Perch" to a group with which this length has nothing to do. This error does not appear in the pamphlet printed in 1877.

We would sum up this report by saying that it illustrates but too forcibly some of the gravest defects in the present system of doing the work of our Government. The object which the committee endeavors to further is a good one, viz: the unification of weights and measures; but the M. C. of the last Congress could not bestow the time upon this question of pure statesmanship which its proper understanding requires, and it is but too clear that some underpaid clerk has been delegated by the members to make an indigestible salmagundi of all that has been done, with orders not to stop short of the two hundredth page. Thus more copy is afforded our merry Government presses, more disjointed thinking supplied for trunk linings and lamp lighters, while the committee may have the satisfaction of knowing that their Report is as unsatisfactory in favor of a good cause, as in the gold currency question it might have been fatally effective in a bad one.

As Mr. Culver, clerk to this committee, furnishes a short preface in which he speaks of the report as "compendious" and a "convenient book of reference," it is likely that he is responsible for it. None but the too partial eye of the editor could detect these qualities in a mosaic of which not a stone seems to have been fashioned to fit its place and all are put together without regard to form.

We have been informed that *only* 1200 copies of this report have been published, while 10,000 have been ordered by Congress. It is to be hoped that the other 8800 will not be issued until they have been completely revised and arranged so as to subserve some useful end, however small. At present the report may be compared to the last stanza in the "House that Jack built." Mr. Adams' (J. Q.) first report on the metric system representing the malt said to have lain in that house.

COUES'S BIRDS OF THE COLORADO VALLEY, PART I.¹—Dr. Coues writings on ornithological matters have become so well known both to specialists and the public at large, that the promised advent of a book from his pen is looked forward to with no ordinary degree of interest.

The present volume, "Birds of the Colorado Valley," may be regarded as complementary to the "Birds of the North-west," and when the work is finished, for we are promised a second volume in continuation, we shall have from our author what may be considered, collectively, as a very complete treatise, both technically and biographically, of the birds of our western interior.

The volume is introduced with a prefatory note by Prof. Hayden, in charge, in which is briefly given the scope of the work and a general description of the area treated of, with allusions to its ornithological facies in its broader aspects, together with a graceful mention of the several authors and workers in the same field whose writings and labors have been most largely drawn upon by the author.

The volume is divided into convenient chapters, each treating of a single family and beginning with a concise enumeration of the family characters. The genera or sub-genera are next characterized with sufficient amplitude for all practical purposes, when follows the treatment, in greater or less detail, of each species.

If it be permissible to compare the method of handling the subject adopted here with that of the companion octavo, which was, at the time of its appearance, regarded as so admirable, the present volume loses nothing by the comparison. On the contrary its literary execution appears to have received more care

¹ *Birds of the Colorado Valley*. A Repository of Scientific and Popular Information concerning North American Ornithology. By ELLIOTT COUES. Part I.—Passeres to Laniidae. Seventy illustrations. 8vo, pp. xvi, 807. Washington Government Printing Office, 1878. Miscellaneous publications of the U. S. Geological Survey of the Territories, F. V. Hayden, U. S. Geologist-in-charge.